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Minutes 01/28/2008

Arlington Cultural Council
Minutes of Monday, January 28, 2008
Robbins Memorial library

All Present: Stephanie Marlin-Curiel, Anyahlee Suderman, Karen Dillon, Tom Formicola, Jean Yoder, Betsy Campbell

Tom Formicola called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m.

ITEM 1: Approval of December meeting minutes
The council reviewed and approved meeting minutes from December 2007.

ITEM 2: Welcoming Betsy Campbell back from leave of absence

ITEM 3: Emmanuela's leave of absence
Emmanuela left town to take a teaching position in New York. With Betsy's return, we don't anticipate quorum problems. We have nine voting members. It will be more of an issue in the fall when we have more important votes to take where there may be differences of opinion.

Karen moves to grant Emmanuela a leave of absence until May 31, 2008. Betsy seconds. All say aye.

We will reassess Emmanuela's status at that point, based on whether she plans to return to town.

ITEM 4: RFP's
The December minutes say there are two RFP's outstanding although we have none in hand. The two are Old Schwamb Mill and the PTO Writer's Workshop.

Jean will follow up on Old Schwamb Mill and the PTO Writer's Workshop

It was also noted that Application number 17, the Pierce School had a discrepancy. The amount on the application (\$1,000) did not match the amount on the spreadsheet (\$215).

Karen will email Sharon to contact the Pierce School and make sure we sent only \$215, and not \$1,000.

ITEM 5: Approval letters
Jean got all approval letters out and we are receiving thank you's from the applicants little by little. Tom notes that the timing was good and perhaps we should add to the guidelines for next year that applicants will be notified in early January if their grants are approved.

ITEM 6: Grant Recipients' Reception
We need a date and a venue.
We had talked about holding the reception at the same time that the ACA was doing the project that we funded last year – the Arlington Photography Project: My Takes.

It turns out The ACA is having the exhibit opening coincide with their 20th anniversary fundraiser on April 5. The exhibit will be up for a couple of months.

We are thinking about a date range of early May.

ITEM 8: Stephanie Reports on the Hardy School Breakfast

The event was well-attended – perhaps 60-75 people, mostly parents – and was quite professionally presented. The principal spoke, Nicole Libresco spoke, an MCC representative, the gym teacher, the artists, and eventually a couple of kids. Video of the work in progress was shown. Stephanie reports that the work itself is very impressive and exciting.

The video credited us as the Arlington Arts Council so that should be corrected before the final performance. The principal did acknowledge the presence of the MCC rep but not the ACC rep, but Nicole Libresco did acknowledge the presence of an ACC rep. The event and Stephanie's presence as an ACC rep was also mentioned in the Hardy School newspaper.

ITEM 9: Statehouse Assembly

We have a number of people planning to go the Statehouse Assembly on March 12, 2008.

Before the meeting we should review the priorities we have set and the projects we have funded and be ready to talk about them.

The issue was raised that when lobbying senators it is also important to have research at the ready with numbers to back it up, in an effort to show how funding the arts is good for the economy, will impact the community, and will win political support.

We should get a state of the annual bill and look up a pamphlet that Jean developed and emailed to all of us. We should also have evidence of decline of funding from the state, be conscious of our message, be persuasive and leave them with paper.

Other resources for preparation suggested were:

- a presentation by Professor Ellen Winner, a psychologist, whose work is more related to the arts in schools, but may be relevant here.
- Robert Putnam's Kennedy School Bowling Alone book looking at how the arts build community.
- the MCC website
- the handout in the council members notebook: Arts, Culture and Community Building. There are a lot of websites on there that can help.

ITEM 10: Arlington ArtsFest, a proposal by Stephanie circulated to the council members January 5, 2008

Tom opened the discussion by relaying Michele's comments that he had notes on from a conversation they had prior to the meeting. She thought it was a fabulous idea. She loved it both as a council member and as a chamber representative. It would be great for promoting Arlington's artists and the arts in Arlington. The concerns she had were that it would be lots of work, people would just have to be committed, and it would need to a lot of discussion. We have to see this as an opportunity for community building. Tom and Michele feel that as a council, our role would be promotion, helping people to capitalize on it, do a website for example.

We should aim for the festival to happen in 2010.

Tom suggested that one way to do it would be through a grant process that resembles the one we do now, only we ask that people propose projects to happen during the festival time.

Stephanie emphasized that the festival is intended not only to promote Arlington artists and to build community in Arlington, but:

- to help Arlington businesses and expand Arlington's identity, by making Arlington into a destination.

- Build greater audiences for the arts in Arlington from neighboring cities and towns, attracting them by getting some well-known artists, or touring shows to perform in our local theatres. These would be ticketed shows at moderate to high prices depending on the show and the seating.
- Put Arlington on the map more permanently as a cultural destination and attract more regular tourism by creating viable and sustainable partnerships between Arlington businesses and Arlington artists. Tourism is extremely important to the survival of Arlington businesses that are suffering and folding completely. By infusing businesses with more vitality, we can attract more tourism.
- Keep more of Arlingtonians' leisure and entertainment dollars in Arlington. With more tourism, we can attract businesses of greater cultural interest without having to seek cultural experiences in other areas.
- Expand Arlington's identity into a more cosmopolitan place, by blurring our borders and building on the confluence of our urban and suburban appeal. For the duration of the festival, Arlington will look like a busy, happening place packed with visitors. Maybe some of it will stick and people will be inspired to think of ways to make it stick.

The council members raised a variety of questions, concerns and suggestions:

- How will the festival be sustainable?
- Will it still be worth it if it only happens once?
- It does not provide an opportunity for art history, interpretive science and related disciplines that we are also meant to be funding.
- We might be overloading the council and have difficulty recruiting new members. Many of us won't be on the council any more by 2010. Only the newcomers, will still be on the council then. That could be good, because a new crop of people will just see it as part of the council's work. Of course, it could also dissuade them to join.
- It might be better to start smaller and grow. We should explore a variety of visions.
- \$11,000 doesn't go a long way
- We may not get one big sponsor but several smaller ones

Stephanie answered some of these.

- We would not only be working with \$11,000. By booking high quality, ticketed shows, the theatres will want them and we won't have to pay for them. Not all performances need to be free.
- It is better to attract one or two main big business sponsors to maximize their publicity benefit. Offering a greater publicity benefit will be what attracts the big business sponsors. Other than limiting the main sponsorship to one or two so we can increase their typeface on publicity material and or even give them title billing, we can offer maximum publicity benefit by 1) concentrating the festival over a finite time period like 10 days rather than a whole summer, and to likewise concentrate the publicity to make a big splash. 2) Creating a big enough festival with a wider range of offerings, and larger audiences from areas in their market. So, for example, Cambridge Savings wants to know we are reaching residents from places where they have branches like Cambridge and wherever else. We will attract those people if we have headline acts and we market to them, rather than focusing only on Arlington artists, audiences, and content.
- The best way to make the festival sustainable is to make it successful.

In conclusion, no one thought the idea was not worth pursuing at all on any level. Tom therefore suggested we schedule another meeting to discuss this further and create next steps for exploration.

Next month, we will have a guest from the Arlington Education Enrichment Fund, have more talk about the reception, promoting the grant recipients, and an update on Assembly preparation.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Marlin-Curiel

